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## Economic and Political Man

Hardship and Attitudes in the Czech Republic and Central Europe\*

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**Abstract:** The interconnection between economic hardship and political attitudes is analyzed in four East-Central European countries. Two explanatory keys to recent left-turns – the “relative deprivation” and “entitlements” theses – are examined. Financial difficulties and paternalistic expectations are high but differ from country to country, this resulting in their various locations on the left-right spectrum. Evaluating the connections leading from perceived economic insecurity to latent participation in demonstrations, no compact causality appears which would allow hypotheses on the direct consequences of households’ hardships on the latent questioning of the regime. A model is used to confirm important country specificities and change over time in translating the feeling of insecurity into leftist and authoritarian attitudes.

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Five years have passed since the turning point in East Central European history. Political and economic systems underwent extensive changes toward the Western democratic and market model, albeit partially and hesitantly on occasion. Peoples’ attitudes, full of enthusiasm and confusion at the beginning, have started to become skeptical and critical towards the political and economic regime. Simultaneously, social structures and coalition networks commenced change implicitly, redefining old and creating new alliances and patterns of collective behavior.

The reestablishment of the market economy and pluralist political systems in East Central European countries is associated with the dismantling of the social security system formerly rooted in the production sphere and supported by revenue financing. Unemployment, new sources of inequality and poverty, the marginalization and exclusion of a part of the population could all lead to dissatisfaction with the new regime. This dissatisfaction in turn can engender support for leftist, authoritarian and populist parties and might somewhat radicalize peoples’ opinions, and ultimately threaten the emerging democracy.

The way citizens experience ongoing transformations can potentially have profound consequences for social peace, political stability and maintenance of the liberal economic order. Many questions arise here. How strongly are people experiencing economic hardship? What role do they think the state should play in economic life? What kind of political organization and leadership do they support? What are the relationships between economic attitudes, the probability of leftist attitudes and latent acceptance of an authoritarian regime?

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Thus far, economic and political research in the Czech Republic has paid little attention to the interconnection between the standard of living and political attitudes. Macroeconomic data are not well counterbalanced by microdata on household economic behavior and especially assessments of households' perceived economic outlook and its effect on political behavior. It is for this reason that we address some of those questions by using several empirical surveys, according to two comparative dimensions: cross-national (in four East-Central European countries) and over time (post-1989 changes in the Czech Republic).

### 1. Crossing the economic/political boundary

The relationship between economic well-being and political behavior has been studied by eminent social scholars. In his famous work, *Political Man*, S. M. Lipset referred to frequent documentation on "the relation between low capita wealth and the precipitation of sufficient discontent to provide the social basis for political extremism" and "the strong relationship between lower social position and support of 'leftist' politics" [Lipset 1981: 47-48].

E. Fromm demonstrated that in transitory situations and economic crises, everyday decision-making is accompanied by a fear resulting from insecurity and a sense of threat, this itself a result of economic and moral crisis. This fear may be reduced by surrendering any decision-making concerning one's life to an external authority, be it a person, group or organization. Thus a person loses freedom but gains security. Democratic institutions are accused of inefficiency and ineptitude and are replaced by the rule of a "strong hand", resulting in totalitarian or authoritarian power relations [Fromm 1965].

During the transformation of the communist system, all possible sources of sudden dissatisfaction may be created and/or strengthened. The adjustment of established economic standards and the introduction of markets cause a decline in the national product, a rise in unemployment and a fall in the population's real incomes. The dissolution of the former social security system generates vulnerability to poverty. This is, however, only one side of the problem, i.e. the "absolute" source of discontent.

Simultaneously, "relative" sources also arise, due to the creation of the new or strengthening of the old "reference groups".<sup>1</sup> Open borders allow much more extensive contact with the rich Western countries, demonstrating for many the gap between "communist" and "capitalist" affluence for the first time. Thanks to the liberalization and marketization, the old properties can be publicly exhibited. A new, wealthy class is generated by restitutions, privatization and the second "primitive accumulation".

From the temporal perspective, the fall of real incomes and the loss of social guarantees contribute to an absolute or relative starvation. Both the absolute and relative deprivation are an important source of discontent and radicalism, as was already shown by Marx.<sup>2</sup> All of this alters the scales on which "the ordinary man" measures the standard of

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<sup>1</sup>) Relative deprivation was conceptualized alternatively as the perception that the individual and/or his/her group is in a disadvantageous position or the perception that individual achievements have failed to keep pace with individual and/or his/her group expectations [Gurney, Tierney 1982].

<sup>2</sup>) "A house may be large or small; as long as surrounding houses are equally small it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But if a palace arises beside the little house, the little house shrinks

living and its transformation. Therefore, the “absolutely” anchored discontent could be amplified by “relative deprivation” and vice versa, setting off political shifts towards radicalism.

Survey research on political attitudes in Western democracies traditionally emphasizes the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the individual. In the absence of a profound and rapid structural transformation, historical milestones are frequently conceptualized as cohort phenomena and discussed in terms of political generations (e.g. the “children of the Great Depression” in [Elder 1974] or our ‘68 generation). In discussions, it is assumed that historical events at the macro-level transcend individual characteristics and define key aspects of the reality that people face in their personal lives.

Across the East Central European region, there is also a considerable amount of research on economic behaviour and political attitudes. On the one hand, there are analyses of public opinion polls documenting shifts as well as reversals in people’s attitudes and the political scene [e.g. Rose, Haerpfer 1992; Plasser 1993; Heyns, Jasinska-Kania 1993]. On the other, systematic research on the economic situation of households and perceptions thereof is emerging [e.g. Beskid et al. 1993; Berger 1994]. There has also been extensive research – initiated by the World Bank – on the “social costs” of the transformation and poverty [Milanovic 1992; Cavalcanti 1993; McAuley 1994; Kakwani 1994] and paralleled by the Social Costs of Economic Transformation (SOCO) project, headed by the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna.

The process of attitude formation is clearly not a passive one. Individuals are actively engaged in their long-term biographies and short-term experiences, modifying externalities into latent and actual activities. The explanatory power of personal characteristics is, however, generally much lower than in Western democracies, this as a result of the weaker crystallization of social structure. A synthesis establishing links between household hardship and individual poverty on the one hand and political attitudes and latent controversial behaviour on the other is needed. The recent political changes in East-Central Europe emphasize the importance of such a study.

## **2. The lessons learnt from recent changes**

Since 1989, important changes have occurred on the East-Central European political scene. In Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, leftist parties took power or – at least – began to participate in government to a considerable degree. In the Czech Republic, the political scene recently saw a marked rise in the social democratic party’s popularity. In Poland, the Alliance of the Democratic Left (the former reform-communist Social Democracy teamed up with the OPZZ trade unions) increased its vote in the September 1993 elections from 12% to 20%, becoming the largest party in Parliament. The Hungarian Socialist Party (formed in 1989 by those who “destroyed the communist system from within”) received 33% of all valid votes and 54% of the parliamentary seats in the May 1994 elections.

In Slovakia, the post-communist/authoritarian/populist Movement For Democratic Slovakia clearly won the October 1994 elections with 35% of votes, the leftist Common

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into a hut (K. Marx, Wage, Labor and Capital, as quoted in [Lipset 1981: 48]). See, however, especially his theory on absolute and relative “miseration”.

Option coming in with 10% and the new Association of Slovak Workers securing an important place with 7% of the votes. In the Czech Republic, the leading parties ODS (the Civic Democratic Party) and ODA (the Civic Democratic Alliance) are experiencing a constant decrease in their potential support whereas the CSSD (Czech Social Democracy) has doubled its potential support since the mid-1992 elections, with the result that the numbers of ODS and CSSD supporters are as close as ever. This signalizes the possibility of changing the proportion of seats in the post mid-1996 election Parliament, if not the necessity of establishing a Great Coalition government in the here and now.

Table 1. Left-right political orientation (%)

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
1991				
Extreme left	5.6	4.2	5.1	9.1
Rather left	17.1	19.2	18.2	18.7
Middle	38.4	56.9	50.6	40.9
Rather right	26.3	15.7	17.4	21.4
Extreme right	12.7	4.0	8.7	9.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
L/R index*	44.2	51.0	48.4	48.9
Std dev	26.4	20.5	23.8	26.9
1995				
Extreme left	3.3	4.5	7.1	6.5
	5.6	5.3	8.9	7.6
	9.7	16.5	14.9	14.6
Middle	35.7	60.9	46.3	44.7
	19.5	8.5	10.8	13.5
	16.0	2.4	7.2	6.4
Extreme right	10.2	1.9	4.8	6.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
L/R index*	41.6	53.7	52.5	50.6
Std dev	24.2	17.4	23.3	23.8

Sources: Dismantling of Social Safety Net 1991;  
Social Consequences of Transition.

\*) The index is calculated such as 0=extreme right and 100=extreme left.

The distribution of left-right political affiliation and its recent shifts is displayed in Table 1. The rank order of countries is the same in 1991 and 1995, with Hungary the most "left-ist" (and even more "centrist") country and the Czech Republic the most "rightist". Looking at the Left/Right Index, there was a small shift toward the right in the Czech Republic whereas other countries turned to the left, Slovakia somewhat less and Hungary and Poland at a more rapid pace. The dispersion around the political middle decreased slightly in the Czech and Slovak populations while dispersing less in Hungary and remaining the same in Poland.

There are at least two explanatory keys to the left-turn and/or authoritarian tendencies of East-Central European democracies. The first is the "relative deprivation" thesis on unfulfilled expectations of improvement in the population's well-being. The second is the "entitlements" thesis that people have not relinquished their reliance upon the state

and still welcome a strong redistributive state. In what follows, we will develop these theses consecutively, beginning with the “relative deprivation” thesis.

According to E. Wnuk-Lipiński, there is a general shift from value-oriented to interest-oriented perceptions of the transformation. As long as the economic transformation was evaluated in terms of values, the majority of the Polish population supported it as “right”. However, once implementation of the reform began to touch the standard of living of important categories of the populace (especially qualified workers in large state enterprises and private farmers), the social base of economic reforms eroded and, finally, the radical reform strategy was rejected, despite enjoying partial success [Wnuk-Lipiński 1995].

According to P. Matijù, in all countries except the Czech Republic, the downward social and income mobility has not been counterbalanced by an upward mobility, thus making those countries vulnerable to the left-turn: “other things being equal, the higher the number of people who feel like ‘losers’ in a given country, the higher is the risk of a left-turn” [Matijù 1995: 22]. A similar approach and reasoning is to be found in [Øehák-ová, Vlachová 1995].

Using the comparative data, the Czech Republic actually scores highest in terms of the population’s satisfaction with the recent developments. Despite the fact that acceptance of the market economy is decreasing, satisfaction with the developing democracy is increasing. This is the only country among the Visegrád Four where levels of satisfaction with the market economy, human rights, democracy and the overall direction of the country are converging, reaching similar levels in 1994. Whereas commitment to the free market is also high in Poland, the gap between the evaluation of the development of the economy, on the one hand, and democracy, on the other, is greater. In contrast to these two countries, both the satisfaction with democratic development and country direction are perceived as having been on the decrease in Hungary and Slovakia over the last several years, this according to the CEE Barometer.

The most apparent synthesis of inter-country differences in attitudes might be the evaluation of the present regime in comparison with the pre-1989 system, as revealed most recently by the SOCO comparative survey 1995. Whereas the present regime is better for 57% of Czechs, only 43% of Poles, 32% of Slovaks and a mere 25% of Hungarians evaluate the new regime as better than the previous one. Following this indicator, the level of today’s financial troubles in fact differs considerably more than any leftist or authoritarian preferences.

There are indeed many positive features of the recent development in the Czech Republic: the unemployment rate is currently around 3%; income inequality has increased but is still the lowest in the region; the “official poverty” rate is lower than in “social” West European countries; and households seem very active in both the formal and informal economy. Nevertheless, there are also many social problems and sources of various dissatisfactions: perceived (subjective) poverty is rising and most households are experiencing financial problems. Liberal markets are finding less acceptance and a social-market solution is increasingly preferred [Veěerník 1995].

In the cross-country comparison of the past five years alone, the Czech population could be considered the winner of the reform process. This is not valid to such a degree within the country (where a considerable portion of people perceived themselves to be losers) and may not necessarily be valid in the future (less Czechs expect an advancement

on the income ladder than Poles and Slovaks). Nevertheless, whatever changes we register in the past period, the comparative advantage of the stronger market commitment from the Czech populace when compared with other nations continues, simultaneously supporting "rightist" political attitudes and, thus, the relative stability of the regime.

### **3. Financial hardship and expectations of the state**

The communist society seemed extremely equalized in terms of wages, income and the consumer market. Furthermore, people were drilled and indoctrinated in the ideology of equality, such that higher incomes and wealth were always considered to be unfairly won. In line with its ideological and pragmatical functions, the communist state protected people in their jobs and provided them with a minimum security in exchange for loyalty and formal support. The generally low living-standard was more or less acceptable because most of the populace was affected and individual poverty was not necessarily reflected as such in the widespread shortage.

The current economic reform and societal changes had a sudden impact on both the objective and subjective, absolute and relative standards. The decreasing consumption of large parts of the population is being met with rising claims and expectations. Financial difficulties are also experienced as more considerable when compared with higher expectations. In other words, the utility of the same amount of money (in absolute terms) is decreasing in a period of rising expectations (in relative terms), now that Austria and Germany are becoming the reference for the living-standard of such countries.

In absolute terms, when people estimate their financial comfort or difficulties, the bottom line of great difficulty comprises 5% of households in the Czech Republic, 24% in Hungary, 27% in Poland and 10% in Slovakia as a vulnerable population. When comparing the 1980s retrospective with the current situation, the percentages vary as multiples of those retrospective evaluations, while the ordering of countries remained the same. The only exception is Slovakia, where the situation in 1988 was considered better than in the Czech Republic but is currently much worse in people's minds.

In relative terms, nearly a half of the Hungarian, Polish and Slovak populations experienced a deterioration in their relative income position within society, while slightly over one tenth experienced an improvement. In contrast, only 30% of the Czech population declared downward income mobility and 18% upward mobility. Predictions of the change in income position within the next three years are somewhat less gloomy than the evaluation of the past, despite the fact that disparities between countries have attenuated only slightly.

We are comparing national gaps between the actual and desired income, as contained in the question "What would be the monthly sum sufficient to allow a decent way of life for your household?" (Table 2). Regarding total household income, the gap between actual and desired income is the largest in Poland, in both absolute and relative terms. Regarding income adjusted per capita, the absolute gap is the largest in Slovakia and, in relative terms, is about 58% in the three countries except the Czech Republic. It seems that a sort of "Czechoslovak need standard" continues to operate in both countries in per capita income terms while the actual income levels diverge.

Table 2. Actual and desired “decent” income in 1995 (in USD)

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
<i>Total household income</i>				
the official ER				
actual	324	290	272	254
desired	496	524	552	440
difference	-172	-234	-280	-196
adjusted to PPP				
actual	762	508	615	754
desired	1167	920	1246	1308
difference	-405	-412	-631	-554
difference in %	65	55	49	58
<i>Per capita household income</i>				
the official ER				
actual	123	112	94	83
desired	186	194	172	142
difference	-63	-82	-78	-59
adjusted to PPP				
actual	289	197	222	247
desired	439	341	390	424
difference	-150	-144	-168	-177
difference in %	66	58	57	58

Source: Social Consequences of Transition.

ER = official exchange rate

PPP = purchasing power parity (recalculation according to [Havlik 1994]).

Simplifying the problem, financial hardship could be solved in two ways: either by mobilizing personal labor efforts and alternative resources of households or by making the state responsible and demanding its engagement in providing the minimum standard of living for households. Between the “pure” liberal and “pure” paternalistic solutions, there is an endless variety of forms and combinations, real life being more diverse than any conceivable model. Nevertheless, there is a considerable reliance on state protection within post-communist nations, be that a legacy of state control forcefully implemented by the previous regime or the conviction of helplessness in sudden hardship.

According to J. Sachs, the living standards of the Central-Eastern European populations did not really drop nor did the people want to use the left-wing parties as instruments to undo the new market economy. “Rather than seeing the Eastern European elections as great referenda on the market system, or on capitalism versus communism, or even as protest votes against harsh reforms, one can see that the elections (...) have become exactly like elections in Western Europe and the United States: dominated by interest-group politics. Left-wing parties are winning the elections (...) because they are seen by the organized recipients of state largesse as the parties most likely to maintain or increase the entitlements of the social welfare state” [Sachs 1995: 1-2].<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>) This view was vehemently challenged by two Polish economists who state that “...the frequent elections and negative campaigns, the derailment of the economic policy, and the absence of right-wing parties from the Parliament since 1993, all have their immediate origin in the unduly cruel



Table 3. The state's responsibilities in various fields

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
Health care	87.4	85.5	84.9	90.0
Child care (under 6)	67.4	69.1	66.4	70.3
Primary education	90.3	83.5	92.4	89.6
Secondary education	70.2	80.5	82.1	74.7
Higher education	57.9	78.5	70.5	63.3
Costs of children	58.9	69.4	54.2	62.3
Decent pensions	88.2	91.4	90.7	92.7
First home for the young	69.5	81.6	68.7	77.0
Availability of jobs	73.8	88.0	85.2	85.4
Living conditions for disabled	92.9	86.0	92.5	91.9

Source: Social Consequences of Transition.

\*) The opinions are measured by an index which runs from 0 (no responsibility) to 100 (full responsibility).

Within the generally high level of expectations from the state, there are considerable differences among Central-East European countries. This was already observed in the survey "Social Justice" and the ISSP module "Social Inequality" of the early 1990s, and is to be observed again in 1995 in the SOCO survey, "Social Consequences of Transition". According to the score of "core" securities (jobs, housing, costs of children and pensions), the lowest level of expectations is declared by the Czech population whilst the highest level of paternalistic expectations seems to be located in Hungary (Table 3).<sup>4</sup>

Although commitment to liberal values is still highest in the Czech Republic, we can also observe a regressive movement "back" to state paternalism. In the period directly after 1989, the new commitment to liberal values was simply added to continuing expectations of state engagement in the economy, job security, price controls, etc. Such ambiguous attitudes during the initial phases of the transformation are dissolving and being replaced by the not so widespread but more consistent opinions tending either to free market play or to state guarantees. The main tendency is, however, increasing anticipation of state protection of jobs, rents and prices.

A rising portion of the Czech population is also attracted by the "social-market" model or even the previous socialist model. In the pre-election and election period of the first half of 1992, the "third ways" were rejected by most of the Czech population, leading to the victory of the more liberal parties. Beginning in early 1993, however, the social-market system appeared to be the most desirable solution, unlike the previous period,

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reforms... It was not careless social policy that led to the expenditures explosion. Instead, it was the unforeseen consequences of the overall economic policy and, in particular, of the stabilization program sponsored by the IMF and vigorously recommended by Professor Sachs." [Kabaj, Kowalik 1995: 7].

<sup>4</sup>) In Western Europe, there is a generally high expectation that the state will provide a decent standard of living for the old (above 90%), a somewhat lower requirement of decent housing for those who cannot afford it (around 80%) and an even lower requirement that the state should provide a job for everyone who wants one (60-70%), according to the ISSP surveys "Role of Government – 1990" [Bean, Papadakis 1995]. There are certain differences between more liberal and more social countries, the Scandinavian populations almost reaching the same high levels of expectations in East-Central Europe.

when the majority of the population voted for Václav Klaus' "market without adjectives" model.<sup>5</sup>

Although fewer people agree with state control of the economy, the percentage of respondents accepting complete freedom for private ventures and foreign firms is on a constant decrease while endorsement of new properties is generally low. After a short period of enthusiasm for the widening range of earnings distribution, most people are becoming suspicious of larger inequalities. The percentage of people who believe that differences in salaries should be larger is decreasing, fewer people hold that poverty is the responsibility of the individual, and more people consider that wealth is mostly acquired by unfair practices.

Such a continuous change in attitudes is partly legitimized by direct experience, which provides numerous piteous examples. There could be several other explanations. First: while liberal attitudes were a fashionable deviation at the beginning of the transformation, people are now looking for easy solutions. Second: the last years have been a lesson in restraint, with the fears of a further rise in living costs generating demands for increased state protection. Third: the pendulum of history has reached the extreme right and is returning to the left. Fourth: Czechs are traditional levellers and social democrats and have resisted extreme disparities since the loss of their gentry after the Battle on the White Mountain in 1620.

Although the Czech populace is somewhat particular, it is not so distanced from its Eastern neighbors regarding high and increasing expectations of state protection. In all countries, budgetary constraints are such that nobody can meet these requirements. This means that the objective and necessary gap between expectation and reality could be used for political goals. It implicitly involves centralist, etatist and/or authoritarian tendencies and could be used for the rise of leftist parties and fuel political radicalism.

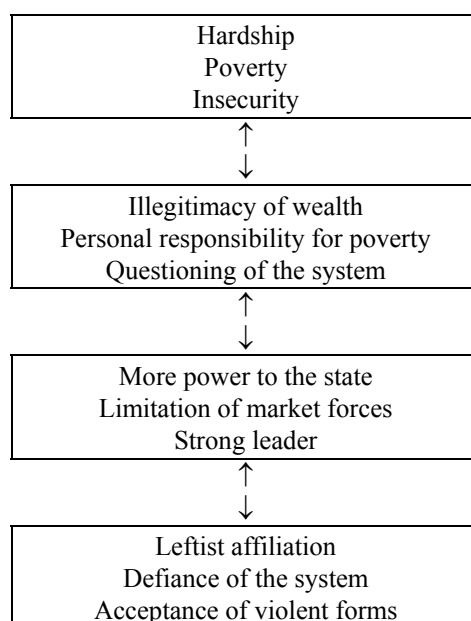
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<sup>5</sup>) The popular perception of the social market model is far from the original concept of W. Eucken, A. Müller-Armack and "Kreis Ordo", in which the state was supposed to be a guarantor of the market economic order. The popular perception is much closer to a "third way", where the state provides substantial social guarantees and redistributes incomes. It obviously reflects the existing German and Austrian model which includes large welfare provisions [Barry 1993].

#### 4. Questioning the democratic system

When studying and evaluating households' financial hardship on the one hand and their expectations from the state on the other, one important question arises: namely, the relationships between perceptions of the economic situation, political attitudes and necessitating or allowing a change in the political system. The argument could be developed as follows:

Diagram 1. The "circuit model" of the relationship between financial hardship and questioning of the system



- A. Due to unemployment, frozen or decreasing real incomes and inflation, households are coming up against financial difficulties. They express these difficulties in terms of feelings of hardship, subjective poverty, insecurity and a gloomy economic outlook.
- B. Due to both the objective situation and subjective feelings, the economic reforms and political regime could be blamed: poverty is not the individual's responsibility but mostly the state's concern, new wealth is illegitimate, the socio-political system is unfair and should be transformed.
- C. The necessity for change is manifested in the demand that the state play a greater role and reassert its responsibilities, limit the free play of market forces and democratic discussion. A strong leader would be welcomed.
- D. Due to such needs, people are attracted by the leftist parties and acknowledge the possibility of civil disobedience and, as the case may be, also less peaceful ways of voicing discontent.

In fact, this argument could proceed from any one of the abovementioned points:

Starting with the "ideological" point of view (B), individual sensitivity to sudden hardship is biased by personal ideological perspectives. If economic and social inequali-

ties are considered as unfair from the outset, one's own situation is likely to be perceived as undeserved poverty, other things remaining equal.

With memories of the communist past and sympathies to a rather strong state as the point of departure (C), the evaluation of one's current financial situation could be negatively biased, with the state and market failures being far more painfully experienced.

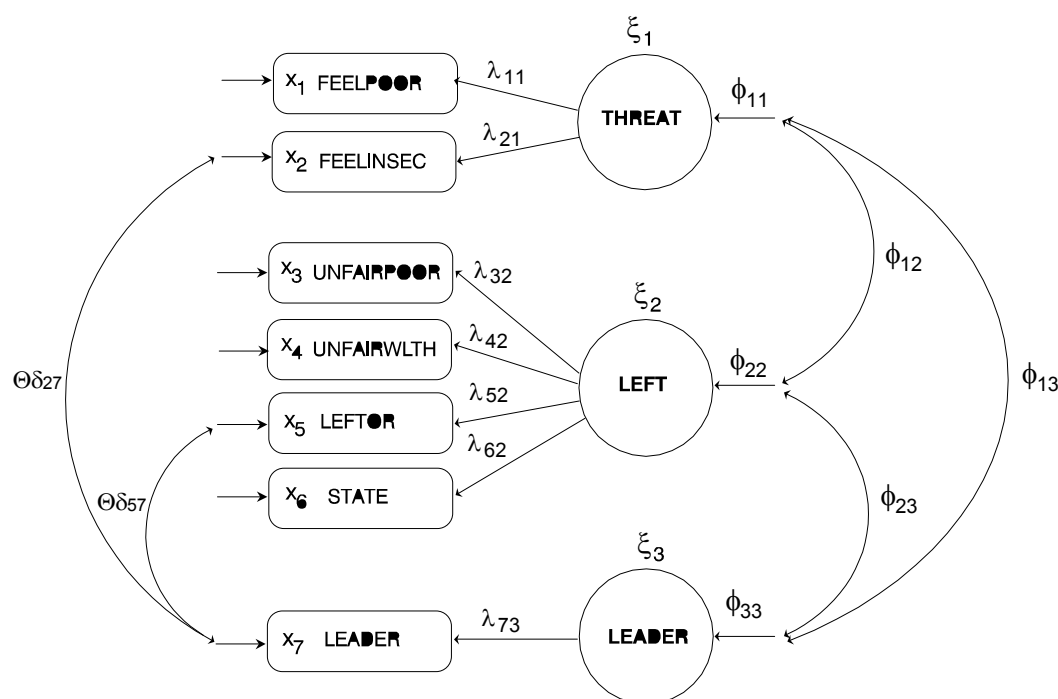
With political orientation or party's affiliations (D) as the point of departure – not chosen freely but originally determined by family background, community or important others – all ideological perspectives, expectations of the state and ways of voicing discontent can be pre-formed or deformed by this fact.

Instead of a causal relationship, we are dealing with a circuit where dependent and independent variables are to be distinguished simply by selecting this or that hypothesis. We could therefore feed (with data) and develop (by analyses) all levels and components of the model and consider all possible feedbacks without ever finding a "true" cause.

Here, for various reasons, we should adopt a skeptical stance towards survey data: they are exclusively individual, not revealing collective attitudes and goals. They are often biased by the imputations of the researchers' hypotheses in survey questions. Further, they can hardly expose historical roots and cultural norms which actually and simultaneously form attitudes as well as behaviour. This is rather the task of historians analyzing the present as a continuation and reflection of individual countries' past, this when observing social-democratic tendencies in the Czech Republic, populist tendencies in Hungary, authoritarian tendencies in Poland and nationalist tendencies in Slovakia – or rather, differently accentuated mixtures of all tendencies in all countries under observation.

We document part of this reasoning on two datasets: the first is a four-country dataset based on the survey "The Dismantling of the Safety Net and its Political Consequences" which has enabled us to make a cross-national comparison. The second is a two-country dataset based on the November 1994 survey "Economic Expectations and Attitudes" which has enabled us to make a comparison overtime. Given the complex limitations of matter and method, we will be much more restrictive in our analytical model than in its theoretical counterpart. By a confirmatory factor analysis, we have modelled the most important relationships in the interplay between economic insecurity and political attitudes.

Diagram 2. Crystallization of political attitudes in East-Central Europe  
A model of confirmatory factor analysis



Three latent variables represent the core of our empirical exercise in cross-national and comparison overtime:

- The latent variable THREAT is measured by two observed variables: subjective feelings of poverty (FEELPOOR) and feelings of insecurity (FEELINSEC).
- The latent variable LEFT is measured by four observed variables: the belief that the poor are not responsible for their situation (UNFAIRPOOR), the belief that people get rich mostly by unfair means (UNFAIRWLTH), one's position on the left-right political spectrum (LEFTOR) and the opinion that the state should provide jobs (STATE).
- The latent variable LEADER is a simple measurement model consisting of only one observed variable LEADER expressing preference for the rule of a "strong hand".

The analysis focuses on relationships between latent variables (parameters  $\phi_{12}$ ,  $\phi_{13}$ ,  $\phi_{23}$ ) that are assumed to differ between countries and/or to strengthen over time. The model also makes an explicit assumption that there may be two specific associations of theoretical relevancy. First, we assume that preferences for an authoritarian leader can be based specifically on feelings of insecurity and not associated with left-wing political orientation ( $\Theta\delta_{27}$ ) and can be interpreted as right-wing authoritarianism. Second, there may be a tendency (especially for some groups) to interpret the leftist orientation as a left-type authoritarian regime ( $\Theta\delta_{57}$ ). Consequently, the meaning of the LEFT variable as located in the model is nearing the social democratic orientation common in Western democracies.

Concerning the differences between countries (Table 4), the measurement models show a high degree of similarity, while the relevant associations confirm cross-national differences. The relationships between feelings of economic threat and political attitudes

were already strong in 1991, especially the link between threat and leftist orientation. Simultaneously, the following country specificities are observable:

- a) The Czech Republic shows the most consistent structure of relationships, characterized by the strongest association between economic insecurity and leftist orientation on the one hand ( $\phi_{12}$ ) and authoritarian inclination on the other ( $\phi_{13}$ ). At the same time, neither feelings of insecurity nor left-wing political orientation produced any specific response in authoritarian tendencies. The same is valid for the association between strong leadership and mass discontent (variable RIOTS, not included in the analysis) which indicates that approval of mass discontent is of a much more passive nature, to be understood more in terms of fears rather than personal anticipation or latent participation.
- b) Hungary also showed a quite consistent structure of economic/political attitudes which is not far from the Czech pattern with, however, two specific features: whereas the feelings of insecurity feature less in leftist attitudes ( $\phi_{12}$ ), leftist attitudes engender a more authoritarian inclination ( $\phi_{23}$ ). Generally, however, in this country all associations are strong, including that between leadership and mass discontent, this indicating a more active potential in the feelings of insecurity.

Table 4. Crystallization of political attitudes in four East-European countries in 1991  
Unstandardized LISREL parameters of the model in Diagram 2.

Parameter and label	Czech Republic N = 1100	Hungary N = 1500	Poland N = 1500	Slovakia N = 817
<i>A. Factor loadings (unconstrained elements of <math>\Lambda_{\nu}</math>)</i>				
$\lambda_{11}$ (FEELPOOR)	0.57	0.84	1.18	0.53
$\lambda_{21}^{\textcircled{a}}$ (FEELINSEC)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
$\lambda_{42}$ (UNFAIRPOOR)	0.87	0.46	1.12	0.93
$\lambda_{32}$ (UNFAIRWLTH)	0.89	1.14	1.52	1.16
$\lambda_{52}$ (LEFTOR)	0.80	0.64	0.78	0.83
$\lambda_{62}^{\textcircled{a}}$ (STATE)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
$\lambda_{73}^{\textcircled{a}}$ (LEADER)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>B. Errors of measurement (diagonal elements of <math>\Theta_{\delta}</math>)</i>				
$\Theta_{\delta 11}$ (FEELPOOR)	0.83	0.77	0.70	0.87
$\Theta_{\delta 22}$ (FEELINSEC)	0.48	0.67	0.79	0.53
$\Theta_{\delta 33}$ (UNFAIRPOOR)	0.83	0.96	0.84	0.89
$\Theta_{\delta 44}$ (UNFAIRWLTH)	0.82	0.76	0.71	0.82
$\Theta_{\delta 55}$ (LEFTOR)	0.86	0.92	0.92	0.91
$\Theta_{\delta 66}$ (STATE)	0.78	0.82	0.87	0.87
$\Theta_{\delta 77}^{\textcircled{a}}$ (LEADER)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>C. Correlations between errors of measurement (off-diagonal elements of <math>\Theta_{\delta}</math>)</i>				
$\Theta_{\delta 27}$ (FEELINSEC x LEADER)	-0.07	0.03	0.14 <sup>***</sup>	-0.08
$\Theta_{\delta 57}$ (LEFTOR x LEADER)	-0.05	0.00	0.05 <sup>*</sup>	-0.06
<i>D. Variances and covariances of latent variables (elements of <math>\Phi</math>)</i>				
$\phi_{11}$ (THREAT)	0.52	0.33	0.21	0.47
$\phi_{22}$ (LEFT)	0.22	0.18	0.13	0.13
$\phi_{33}$ (LEADER)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
$\phi_{12}$ (THREAT x LEFT)	0.31 <sup>***</sup>	0.23 <sup>***</sup>	0.17 <sup>***</sup>	0.20 <sup>***</sup>
$\phi_{13}$ (THREAT x LEADER)	0.24 <sup>***</sup>	0.22 <sup>***</sup>	0.08 <sup>***</sup>	0.28 <sup>***</sup>
$\phi_{23}$ (LEFT x LEADER)	0.13 <sup>***</sup>	0.22 <sup>***</sup>	0.07 <sup>***</sup>	0.15 <sup>***</sup>
<i>E. Model fit statistics</i>				
$\chi^2/\text{df}$	53.3/10	24.1/10	19.2/10	15.6/10
AGFI	0.96	0.99	0.99	0.98
RMRI	0.035	0.020	0.019	0.022

<sup>a</sup> Fixed parameter

Statistical significance: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

(not reported for factor loadings, errors of measurement, and variances of latent variables that are all significant at the level  $< 0.001$ )

c) Poland, on the other hand, showed the weakest associations between feelings of insecurity, leftist attitudes and authoritarian inclination. This also indicates the low predictability of the political landscape in 1991. The demand for a strong leader scores the highest among the countries under observation and appears rather as an objective in itself. Thus, it manifests associations neither with feelings of insecurity, nor with the left-right axis. Given that the Polish populace declares itself the most inclined to mass protest, its profile appears just as indistinct as that of other opinions.

d) Slovakia, still part of Czechoslovakia in 1991, already displayed a slightly different pattern to its “older brother”. Though the feelings of insecurity revealed a markedly weaker association with leftist attitudes, its association with authoritarian inclination was already stronger. Furthermore, the (excluded) correlation of authoritarianism and allowing mass discontent (RIOTS) was strongest in the pre-split Slovakia.

Table 5. Crystallization of political attitudes in Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1991 and 1994.  
Unstandardized LISREL parameters of the model in Diagram 2.

Parameter and label	Czech Republic		Slovakia	
	1991 N = 1100	1994 N = 1300	1991 N = 817	1994 N = 812
<i>A. Factor loadings (unconstrained elements of <math>\Lambda_x</math>)</i>				
$\lambda_{11}$ (FEELPOOR)	0.57	0.70	0.53	0.97
$\lambda_{21}^@$ (FEELINSEC)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
$\lambda_{42}$ (UNFAIRPOOR)	0.87	0.95	0.93	0.98
$\lambda_{32}$ (UNFAIRWLTH)	0.89	0.93	1.16	0.74
$\lambda_{52}$ (LEFTOR)	0.80	0.98	0.83	0.56
$\lambda_{62}^@$ (STATE)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
$\lambda_{73}^@$ (LEADER)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>B. Errors of measurement (diagonal elements of <math>\Theta_\delta</math>)</i>				
$\Theta_{\delta 11}$ (FEELPOOR)	0.83	0.69	0.87	0.76
$\Theta_{\delta 22}$ (FEELINSEC)	0.48	0.37	0.53	0.75
$\Theta_{\delta 33}$ (UNFAIRPOOR)	0.83	0.71	0.89	0.72
$\Theta_{\delta 44}$ (UNFAIRWLTH)	0.82	0.73	0.82	0.84
$\Theta_{\delta 55}$ (LEFTOR)	0.86	0.69	0.91	0.91
$\Theta_{\delta 66}$ (STATE)	0.78	0.68	0.87	0.70
$\Theta_{\delta 77}^@$ (LEADER)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>C. Correlations between errors of measurement (off-diagonal elements of <math>\Theta_\delta</math>)</i>				
$\Theta_{\delta 27}$ (FEELINSEC x LEADER)	-0.07	0.04	-0.08	0.01
$\Theta_{\delta 57}$ (LEFTOR x LEADER)	-0.05	0.01	-0.06	0.11 ***
<i>D. Variances and covariances of latent variables (elements of <math>\Phi</math>)</i>				
$\phi_{11}$ (THREAT)	0.52	0.63	0.47	0.25
$\phi_{22}$ (LEFT)	0.22	0.32	0.13	0.30
$\phi_{33}$ (LEADER)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
$\phi_{12}$ (THREAT x LEFT)	0.31 ***	0.39 ***	0.20 ***	0.26 ***
$\phi_{13}$ (THREAT x LEADER)	0.24 ***	0.24 ***	0.28 ***	0.04 ***
$\phi_{23}$ (LEFT x LEADER)	0.13 ***	0.28 ***	0.15 ***	0.18
<i>E. Model fit statistics</i>				
$\chi^2/\text{df}$	53.3/10	51.9/10	15.6/10	25.8/10
AGFI	0.96	0.99	0.98	0.99
RMRI	0.035	0.027	0.022	0.028

<sup>@</sup> Fixed parameter

Statistical significance: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

(not reported for factor loadings, errors of measurement, and variances of latent variables that are all significant at the level  $<0.001$ )



There are considerable differences in attitudes between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. There are more intensive feelings of insecurity and poverty, a stronger reliance upon the state and a greater demand for a “true” leader in Slovakia. While in the Czech Republic, the call for a strong leader is decreasing sharply, Slovakia remains on a constantly high level.<sup>6</sup> Concerning the overtime trajectories in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Table 5), the results suggest that only one tendency was common to both countries, namely an increase in the association between feelings of insecurity and leftist preferences ( $\phi_{12}$ ). Other changes were nation-specific.

In the Czech Republic we are witnessing an increasing coherence between the threat, leftist orientation and authoritarian inclination which supports the crystallization thesis, i.e. that the links between individual opinions are becoming more pronounced, thus testifying to people’s deeper insight into the socio-economic-political field. In the crystallization process, the specific association between feelings of economic insecurity and acceptance of a strong leader weakens, thus suggesting that the economic threat leads to leftist attitudes of a social democratic vein, not including authoritarian options. Independently of feeling poor, however, the political left is increasingly associated with welcoming a strong leader.

In Slovakia, where – similarly to the Czech Republic – the feelings of economic insecurity are strengthening the leftist inclination, the association between economic hardship and the preference for a strong leader almost disappeared between 1991 and 1994. In its place, however, the direct association between an explicit affiliation of the left ( $\Theta_{857}$ ) and the option for a strong leader dramatically increased. Thus, unlike the Czech Republic, those experiencing economic hardship have lost their earlier illusions that a strong leader could solve the problem. Generally, Slovak society is moving towards more authoritarian preferences and lesser readability of attitudes and, consequently, diminished predictability of the political scene.

In our analytical model, we have left out the attitude declaring acceptance of demonstrations and strikes (RIOTS). Although the level of this acceptance is not negligible and is, to some degree, interconnected with the other attitudes, its inclusion with “standard” political attitudes seems rather problematic. First, its links to other attitudes are much weaker than the links between other opinions; second, its location within the population’s categories is weaker and less determined by respondents’ characteristics than any other; and third, only a very small extreme group’s expression of this attitude is congruent with its political vocabulary.

Given that we are treating this opinion as the most adverse to the standard procedures of parliamentary democracy within all attitudes we survey, there is only a minimal threat to democracy “from below”, and this especially in the Czech Republic. Evaluating the links leading from perceived economic insecurity to latent participation in demonstrations against the regime, no compact interconnections appear which would invite hypotheses concerning the direct relation of individual hardship to an active questioning of the regime.

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<sup>6</sup>) In December 1991, 30% of Czech and 33% of Slovak respondents answered “certainly yes” to the question that a “strong hand” would be welcomed. In December 1994, the percentage was 15% in the Czech Republic and 30% in Slovakia – according to Economic Expectations and Attitudes surveys.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Dismantling communism brings about a situation completely without precedent, in which all variables tend to be unknown. Actors in the changes are newly defined (or define themselves), as are their fields of interest and proposed aims. After being imperceptibly interlinked and subordinated to one political will, the economy and polity are starting to separate from one another while the formerly repressed social structure is beginning to crystallize and manifest itself. This complex change is difficult to label without crossing boundaries of fixed disciplinary claims: economics, sociology and political science.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast with the common post-communist vocabulary, there is no imperative harmony between political democracy and market economy. As C. Offe pointed out, the introduction of democracy and the establishment of a market economy can block each other [Offe 1991, 1994]. Similarly, there are no necessary causal links between economic hardship and questioning of the parliamentary system. Here, our experience is close to Pereira et al., who stressed: “We are aware that the causal chain that leads from individual discontent to organized reaction and from organized reaction to the abandonment of reforms is contingent and complex. Reform may continue against popular resistance, even under democratic institutions” [Pereira et al. 1993: 207].

Although inquiring into peoples’ minds might be interesting and useful, its forecasting value should not be overestimated. People behave not only according to their fixed beliefs but also according to their sudden reactions, be they affected by imputed motivation or external manipulation. Nor, on the other hand, should we underestimate attitudes and perceptions. However, they should be considered not so much according to their absolute levels as to their comparative national specificities and status-specific differentiations, reciprocal links and attachments robust as well as their short-term and long-term trends.

Here, we have proposed two explanatory vehicles for the recent or latent turn towards the left or towards authoritarianism in East-Central European countries: the relative deprivation caused by transformation and lasting entitlements to paternalistic care. The two rationales are undoubtedly interrelated and can enforce each other. Deprivation calls for redistribution and redistribution necessitates a strong state; to work backwards, a large redistribution might undermine market forces which could produce deprivation, and so on. This makes distinctions between the true “driving forces” of political reactions next to impossible.

In the climate of a considerable level of reliance upon the state and financial hardship through the whole region, we should distinguish firstly between the Czech Republic on the one side and the three remaining countries on the other. A small majority of the Czech population agrees that the basis for democracy has already been successfully estab-

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<sup>7</sup>) Here, we agree with K. Müller’s condensed version: “Without exaggerating too much, we can describe an easy division of roles between economic theory, political science and sociology: neo-classic economists argue by functional requirements of efficient markets; political scientists stress the imperatives of Western-style democracy; sociology relates to the institutional prerequisites of the functional market. All of this makes sense as far as we declare what Eastern European societies do not have. In any case, an interesting question is, how rudimentary markets can cooperate with unsecured democracy in a time of a loosening social orientation and in an environment of delegitimated institutions, and which dynamics are liberated by this” [Müller 1995: 42].

lished, while a small minority thinks that it is right to manifest dissatisfaction by demonstrations and strikes. The leftist orientation has a prevailingly social democratic character which hampers the direct translation of economic dissatisfaction into questioning of the democratic system.

There are, fortunately, only two political parties displaying an above-average commitment to demonstrations and strikes and acceptance of a more authoritarian regime in the Czech Republic. The first is the extreme rightist Association for the Republic (3% of potential voters in mid-1995), and the second is the "refurbished" Communist Party (9%). There is also a somewhat higher mass protest inclination among trade union "officials" which, however, comprise only a very small group. When combining the demonstration acceptance and authoritarian preferences, we find less than 5% of the population loosely dispersed in the social structure and overconcentrated on the extreme political left.

Compared with the Czech Republic, Slovakia scores twice as high on the authoritarian scale, as measured by the "strong hand" preference. Simultaneously, this attitude is dispersed among other beliefs without a significant consciousness contour or social status profile. The general unspecificity of public opinion, i.e. a lasting confusion of various attitudes (contrasting with the gradual crystallization of the Czech opinion landscape) also indicates the absence of distinct political actors and/or an unwillingness and/or incapacity to generate any marked change.<sup>8</sup> The analysis revealed a discrepancy between the disappearing belief that a strong leader will solve economic hardship and the emerging association of leftism and authoritarianism.

The Hungarian population locates itself most on the political left, the leftist attitudes producing a more authoritarian inclination. The propensity to favour a strong leader and demonstrations is as strong there as in Slovakia. This might be interpreted as an important action potential for the political scene. In fact, internal policy is cleaved by the fact that the new social-liberal government (established in 1994) is bound to battle for severe cuts in the social budget which is the largest in the region.<sup>9</sup> The population declared itself somewhat more optimistic in 1994 than in 1993, despite a deterioration of the financial situation and the fact that its potential participation in legal demonstrations and strikes amounted to 33% [Lengyel 1995].

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<sup>8</sup>) This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that no manifest disapproval appeared in and after the 1995 "Red July", when a packet of four anti-transformation "strategic" laws was passed by the Parliament. According to the first law, the general (Czechoslovak) privatization scheme was removed. Instead of distributing state property by vouchers, the populace will be symbolically compensated by state bonds and firms will be in fact leased to "honest entrepreneurs" designated by the government. The other three laws are on securities, investment funds (no public exchange of capital), and "securing the strategic interests of Slovakia". A law enabling the state to control prices in the "public interest" is to be discussed this autumn. As the Deputy Prime Minister said: "Do not fear the word socialism... The world tends towards socialism with a capitalist face or towards capitalism with a socialist face".

<sup>9</sup>) This event well documents the pitfall of the market/democracy disharmony mentioned above. In fact, the Constitutional Court disapproved budget cuts proposed by the government due to the "unreadiness of the population" and refused a larger reduction of family allowances and maternity benefits. The question rises as to whether the IMF will rank financial discipline and a government's efforts to economize more highly than its respect for democratic rules.

The Polish population would most salute a strong leader, representing a sort of single value, correlated with a questioning of the legitimacy of wealth and blame-laying for poverty on the state, which has no relation, however, to the aggregate of opinions indicating latent contesting of the system. This is the country with the largest experience of large-scale and mass movements, demonstrations and strikes. Surveys confirmed that various forms of civic disobedience are considered more likely to be used than in the other countries, without being more firmly anchored in the opinion structure.

In fact, we did not endeavour to hypothesize about any strict relationships between the emerging financial hardship, disapproval of economic reforms, support for leftist parties and the salutation of a strong leader. We have tried to model only a part of associations between economic and political indicators expressing starvation and economic insecurity on the one hand and criticism of the system, leftist preferences, and authoritarianism on the other. Rather, with simple causal links, we are dealing with a circuit where it is difficult to distinguish dependent and independent variables. The relationship is far from being an abstract one. In each country, it is rooted in history, modified by the cultural and behavioural setting, and eventually prompted by a particular political situation.

The level of acceptance of demonstrations and strikes is certainly not negligible and separated from the other attitudes. Its inclusion with "standard" political attitudes is not, however, very pronounced, and its location within the population's categories is weaker than any other attitude. This leads us to conclude that economic reforms and political democracy are unlikely to be threatened by a mass movement "from below".<sup>10</sup> With all the limitations of a standard survey of attitudes, rather less impressive links leading from perceived economic insecurity to an active questioning of the regime suggest there is no immediate threat to new democracies in East-Central Europe. This does not diminish, however, the important contribution of such a link to a mass movement once it is triggered off and/or fueled by political conflicts.

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<sup>10</sup>) This is especially true in the Czech Republic and might also be true for Hungary, as G. Lengyel concludes with regard to the "limited predictive force" of survey declarations concerning the potential participation in demonstrations and strikes, putting them into context of confidence in basic social institutions and conflict management [Lengyel 1995: 10].

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#### Surveys used

"The Dismantling of the Safety Net and its Political Consequences." A survey conducted in October 1991. Coordinated and financed by the Institute of East West Security Studies, New York.

The international file includes: the Czech Republic (1187), Slovakia (817), Hungary (1500) and Poland (1491).

“Economic Expectations and Attitudes.” A biannual survey organized by the socio-economics team of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences headed by the author. The samples include about 1800-2200 adults in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

SOCO Survey “The Social Consequences of Transition.” A survey conducted in early 1995 on about 1000 household random samples of five countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the former Eastern Germany). The Social Consequences of Transition database was created under the aegis of Social Costs of Economic Transformation (SOCO) initiated and coordinated by the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna.

### **Operationalization of variables**

“The Dismantling of the Safety Net and its Political Consequences” (Table 4 and 5)

1. FEELPOOR “Comparing your current standard of living with the others, would you say that you are a poor family.”

2. FEELINSEC “If you look into the near future, are you anxious, do you have a feeling of insecurity?”

3. UNFAIRPOOR “Most people are responsible for their own poverty.”

4. UNFAIRWLTH “People get rich here mainly in an unfair way.”

All answers 1-4: 1. fully agree 2. rather agree 3. rather disagree 4. fully disagree.

5. LEFTOR “In politics, the terms “left” and “right” are frequently used. When discussing or thinking about your own political views, please indicate where you would place yourself on a 10-grade scale” (extreme left = 10, extreme right = 1).

6. STATE “Would you agree or disagree that the government should be responsible for the following items: a. Provide a job for everyone who wants one”...

7. LEADER “A strong leader can do more for a country than legislation, discussions and consultations can.”

8. RIOTS “We can expect major eruptions of mass discontent in our society within two years.”

All answers 7-9: 1. fully agree 2. rather agree 3. rather disagree 4. fully disagree

Czech Republic and Slovakia. “Economic Expectations and Attitudes”, November 1994 (Table 5)

1. FEELPOOR “Do you think that you are a poor family?”

2. FEELINSEC “If you look into the near future, are you anxious, do you have a feeling of insecurity?”

3. UNFAIRPOOR “Everybody is responsible for their own poverty.”

4. UNFAIRWLHT “People get rich here mainly in an unfair way.”

Answers 1, 2 and 4: 4. fully agree 3. rather agree 2. rather disagree 1. fully disagree; answers on 3 in an opposite sense.

5. LEFTOR “In politics, the terms “left” and “right” are frequently used. Please indicate where you would place yourself regarding your opinions”: 1. clear right 2. rather right 3. middle 4. rather left 5. clear left.

6. STATE “Should the state provide a job to anyone who wants to work?”

7. LEADER “Would it be better for our country if instead of other ways of solving the current situation, a strong hand would govern and somebody say what to do?”

8. RIOTS “In your opinion, is it right to express dissatisfaction by demonstrations and strikes?”

All answers 6-8: 4. fully agree 3. rather agree 2. rather disagree 1. fully disagree.